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SMITH AND THE CHURCH

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SMITH AND THE CHURCH

By HARRY H. BEATTYS, D.D.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
MEREDITH NICHOLSON

Author of "The House of a Thousand Candles"

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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INTRODUCTION

Last Spring I wrote an article under the title "Should Smith Go to Church," with no idea that it would attract any attention. I was astonished and not a little awed by the great number of personal letters that essay brought me, and by the deluge of newspaper articles in the secular and religious Press that followed its appearance. Most of my critics were friendly, though several religious papers bore harshly upon my lack of spirituality. It was said that my point of view was purely utilitarian, and that I utterly ignored "spirituality." My essay has been the subject of many sermons by ministers of all denominations, not, I am constrained to say, because I offered

anything novel in explanation of Smith's indifference to religion, but because my title presented a tempting target, and some of my suggestions threw into concrete form the views of the average doubting layman.

I have replied to all of my correspondents who showed a serious interest in what I believe to be the most important of questions, but have not felt called upon to reply to printed criticisms. I may say here, however, that I am delighted to find that the church as a topic is still so provocative, and that I am glad to have been instrumental in drawing into the arena so many and so valiant defenders of religion. I welcome the appearance of this volume, because it discusses "Smith's" predicament so frankly and honestly. "Smith" I projected as the average man, and I confess that in the main I spoke for "Smith" and as "Smith." The reproach that I am a person incapable of spiritual perception is not without its sting; and yet I submit that we "Smiths"

are entitled to the consideration of those blessed with spiritual gifts.

A spiritual aristocracy is not likely to further the cause of Christ in these days of awakened social consciousness. Spiritual arrogance in the few will not help the many who stumble in the dark seeking light.

Having been most of my life a church member, and an interested observer of religious phenomena through practically all my adult years, I protest that it is unjust for any one to assume that I arraigned the churches in a spirit of cynicism. Dr. Beattys pays me the compliment of meeting all my criticisms fairly in the open. He has not rummaged in the dark lumber-room of medieval theology to find answers to "Smith's" questions but has discussed them comprehensively in twentieth century sunlight.

A church of saints smugly enjoying their own saintliness is not, to my thinking, a Christian Church. Christ's concern was with sinners. I know of nothing more depressing than the contemplation of churches that serve

only the needs of "good" people. A "fashionable church" is an anomaly and a blasphemy. And many churches of the once-a-week urban type, against which I launched my spear, strike me as having the poorest imaginable excuse for existing. Christianity, if it would catch step with modern life and do its great part in uplifting and sustaining mankind, must extend its friendly helping hand to the poor, the weak, and the erring. And this the average city church is not doing. "Smith" knows this. Nor does it suffice to say to "Smith" that on Sunday prayers are said, hymns sung and sermons preached, and that if he does not present himself in church on Lord's Day it is his own fault if his soul is not saved. This is an easy way of dismissing "Smith's" case against the church, but it is inconceivable that it would be the way of the Carpenter of Nazareth if he were to appear now in our strenuous world.

I had hoped that my suggestion for an immediate movement toward unity through

local effort would have met with a friendlier response than has been given it. For years unity has been discussed and committees have been appointed and conferences have been held by the important denominations ; but I should like to see the matter taken up in its practical, not in its theological, aspects, by the clergy and laymen in some typical American city where all branches of the Christian family are represented. As I have said before, the question must in the end be the practical one of concentration and redistribution in the interest of efficiency. And what an impulse would be given to Christian effort if denominational rivalry could be got rid of, and the work of Christ put forward zealously without division or waste of energy and means. Think of the impression that would be made upon the host of indifferent " Smiths " by condensation and co-ordination !

Many shots have been fired at me for my support of the idea of institutional churches. And yet there again, I can see the practical-

*mind*ed "Smith" doffing his hat to the seven-day-a-week church, with its doors open daily to all in need of spiritual comfort and physical restoration. Clergymen tell me with long faces of the difficulties and embarrassments in the way of a unification of Protestantism. But their trouble is with theology, not with the ideal of service. The grim old theology of our grandfathers still has apparently a firm grip on many of us. And so long as we are more concerned with theology than with broad, efficient Christianity the way will be long and beset with shadows.

I have been asked by many why I omitted any reference to Roman Catholicism in my paper. I shall answer that I have only the warmest admiration for American Catholicism; that it is doing a great and difficult work, and doing it zealously and with dogged persistence and earnestness, and that its "Smiths" seem to be a negligible quantity in its membership. When we Protestants have put our own house in order then we may begin to throw stones at Catholics, Jews

and infidels. Many of my friends among the "Smiths" speak with cordial respect of Catholicism; they admire its efficiency, its patient, steady stroke, its tirelessness. And these are qualities that Protestantism must win for itself.

Publishers tell me that there is just now a great demand for serious books, particularly those that discuss religious, social and economic questions. This I take as a good sign of the times. And I believe that if the church will avail itself of this serious mood of our people to discuss and to illustrate by example the close ties that exist between the Christ Ideal and the needs and hopes of the world, it will be on a fair way to regain its old hold upon the imagination and heart of mankind.

MEREDITH NICHOLSON.

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FOREWORD

THE way these sermons came to be preached is this: in the *Atlantic Monthly* for last June, there appeared an article by Mr. Meredith Nicholson—who writes the introduction to this little book—on “Should Smith Go to Church?” which I read with deep interest. It represented the non-church-goer’s side on the debated question of church attendance. It suggested to me the idea that perhaps the position of the non-church-goer had not received the attention that it deserved; and I decided to take up the subject in the pulpit and try to give “Smith” a “square deal.” These sermons are the result. They aroused an unusual interest

and discussion during the preaching of them, and requests were made to put them into permanent form. The interest they awakened while they were being preached, leads me to think that perhaps they may serve a larger purpose if given the opportunity. So, not with the expectation that they will solve any of the problems touched upon, but with the hope that they may set "Smith" to thinking, and do some good, I send them forth.

HARRY H. BEATTYS.

Chapter I

SMITH AND THE CHURCH

WHO IS SMITH ?

“ Jotham did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did : howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord.”—
II. CHRONICLES xxvii. 2.

IT would be a fair inference from these words that Jotham was not a church-going man. In other respects he was a good man and a good king. He “ did that which was right in the sight of the Lord : howbeit,” and this marked his deficiency, “ he entered not into the temple.” Like lots of other people Jotham was not given to church-going ; did not feel the need of the church, perhaps ; felt

that he could be just as good without going to the temple.

Jotham may well stand as the representative of the modern non-churchgoer, whom I shall call, in this series of sermons, Smith.

Of course you understand that I speak of Smith as a type of hosts of men in our time who on various grounds are indifferent to the claims of religion and the church.

I am very anxious to be fair to Smith. I want to get his point of view as far as I am able. Most of the misunderstandings and misjudgments of life arise from the failure to get the other man's point of view. Putting yourself in the other man's place is a most wholesome and needful thing in any kind of discussion. This I am most anxious to do in this discussion. And while I should be much surprised to have Smith agree with me in all my positions, I hope that he will feel that I have been fair with him, and give him a "square deal." While I want to be perfectly fair to Smith, I also

want to be perfectly frank. And I think Smith wants me to be.

Who is Smith? Smith is the best of good fellows—an up-to-date American, a successful business man, a kind husband and father, a good neighbour and a public-spirited citizen. He lives a clean and respectable life and stands well in the community. His wife is a member of the church and his children go to Sunday-school, and he contributes toward the ~~sup~~ support of the church by paying for his wife's pew. But he himself never, or rarely, goes to church. He spends his Sundays playing golf, motoring, reading his Sunday newspaper, or at his club. Smith is not antagonistic to religion or the church, he is simply indifferent. He believes the churches serve a useful purpose in the world, and is willing to contribute to the church and its benevolent causes. He believes that church-going is a good thing for Brown and for Jones, but for himself, he gets along very well without it.

So far as any one can see, Smith has no deep concern about his soul. He jocosely remarks that his wife keeps up the religious end of the family, and laughingly speaks of himself—though he won't let you call him so—as one of the “goats.” He is an excellent illustration of the homely doggerel :

On the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of strife,
You will find the Christian soldier
Represented by his wife.

Now Smith is a good man, in the general acceptation of that term. And Smith would very deeply resent it if any one were to say that he was not a good man.

One of the most interesting studies is the study of the degeneration of language. Some of the best and most wholesome words in the English language have degenerated by much use. They came into the language bright and clear, like the new coin from the mint, but by much handling have lost the lustre and clearness of their

image and superscription. Such a word that has degenerated is the old Anglo-Saxon word "good," and "goodness." The root of the word good, is God; and the old Anglo-Saxon word for goodness, was *godness*. All true goodness, in the last analysis, is godliness. No man is good, in the best sense, who is not godly.

What you mean, when you say that Smith is a "good" man, is simply that he is a *decent* man. He is kind to his wife and children, pays his debts, doesn't cheat, and won't lie. But, really, it is not a thing to get up on the housetop and shout about, that a man is not a thief nor a cheat nor a liar. Any man who lays the slightest claim to decency, is above these things. When you say that a man is a "good" man, you must mean more than that he is a decent man. The only true goodness is godliness, and the good man is the godly man.

Here is where Smith and I probably would differ. But here is where we draw

near to the real heart of our discussion. You cannot divorce morality and religion. They belong together and cannot be separated. All true morality flowers into true religion, and all true goodness is rooted in righteousness.

It would seem eminently unfair and unjust to call Smith a pagan, and Smith himself would bitterly resent the charge, and so would his friends. And yet, trying to be as fair to Smith as I know how, I cannot help but feel that he is essentially pagan. A man does not have to be a heathen or a worshipper of idols to be a pagan. It is quite possible to be a pagan in these days and in a Christian community. "It is possible to be *in* a Christian civilization but not *of* it ; to reap the benefits which organized Christianity has conferred upon society and never enter a church ; to benefit by the incalculable privilege of the Christian Sabbath and give the whole day to amusement." A pagan is not necessarily a bad man ; on the contrary he may

be a very good man, in the general acceptance of that term. He may be above reproach—honest, honourable, kind.

But he lives

As if Jesus had never lived,
As if He had never died.

He entirely ignores religion and the spiritual interests of his own soul, and lives his life as if it were bounded entirely by immediate interests and pleasures. The spiritual life is an unreal life to him; he gives no thought to it, and makes no provision for it. He gives his Sundays to golf, or motoring, or tennis, or his club. There are hosts of such men, and among them are to be found some of the most influential men in the community, leaders in the world of business and finance. They are carrying burdens and are under pressure that their fathers never dreamed of, and they need more out-of-door life; they must have the open active life, the freedom and variety. The trouble with these men does not lie so

much in what they are doing as in what they are not doing. It is perfectly right and praiseworthy that they should build up their physical life, but it is all wrong and utter folly that they should dwarf their spiritual life. I have no quarrel with Smith for the wholesome things that he *does*. I will not quarrel with him for playing golf or motoring on Sunday, though I have my convictions on this. I have no quarrel with Smith for the things he does, but I have a quarrel with him for the things he is leaving undone. And it may be that the church has made a mistake by paying so much attention to the things men are doing, and paying so little attention to the things they are leaving undone.

And I call Smith a pagan, because the whole religious aspect of life has passed out of his thought, and he lives "as the best Romans lived, but falls immeasurably below the level of Christian privileges and responsibilities." As yet, he is "untroubled by a spark."

The modern pagan ignores the finest things of his inheritance, living in the lower parts of his being. It is as though one were to inherit a magnificent palace and were to close the galleries and libraries and splendid halls, opening only the dining-room, there to live and feed. Happy the man who is a fine fellow and a good business man ; but alas ! if he is *only that*. Happy he who prospers in material things ; but alas ! if he is dwarfed and shrivelled in spiritual things. To be a millionaire in things physical and material and bankrupt in things spiritual, is enough to make the angels weep.

We need to emphasize again and again in our day that man is something more than a splendid animal. Life is something more than meat and drink.

It is the height of folly for a man to go through his life as though he were some splendid dog or a fine-blooded horse. Man is something more than a fine animal ; he is spirit, and has an immortal soul.

A friend of mine once asked a man about his soul, and received the answer, "Oh, I don't have time to think about such things." Here is the tragedy of our day, that men are so busy with the affairs of this world that they do not have time to think about their souls. We are developing muscle at the cost of spirit, and I submit to you that that is a fearful price to pay. If Christ were among us to-day, I am sure he would add another "woe" to those he uttered against the men of his day. And would it not be, "Woe to the man who builds up his body at the expense of his soul?"

As we study the lives of the men about us we are impressed by the superficiality of their living. There is a lamentable lack of depth and perspective in their lives. Ruskin says, somewhere, that every great painting must "have an escape into eternity." If this is necessary for a picture, how much more for a soul!

A literary woman once consulted an

oculist concerning an ailment of her eyes. Upon examination he said: "Madam, your eyes are simply tired; you need to rest them." "But," she replied, "this is impossible: my engagements are such that I must use them." After reflecting for a moment, he asked: "Have you any wide views from your home?" "Oh, yes," she answered with enthusiasm. "From the front porch I can look out upon a glorious range of mountains." "Very well," replied the oculist, "that is just what you need. When your eyes feel tired, look steadily at your mountains for ten minutes—twenty would be better; the far look will rest your eyes." It is the "far look," the look that pierces eternity and finds God, that Smith needs and must have if he is to fulfil his highest destiny.

"If a harper on his way to the king's palace to sing his epic and get his coronation should busy himself on the road in cutting his harp strings, one after another,

and using them to lead his dog with, or to play with his child, or to fix his harness, so that when he reached the king's palace he would have no strings to his harp," he would be like thousands of Smiths who are building up their outward lives at the expense of their spiritual instincts and soul aspirings.

So I would say to Smith, "Beware, lest you spend your whole life in building up external prosperity. Do not forget that you must build up on the inside just as fast as you build up on the outside, if you are to reach your largest powers and fulfil your highest destiny."

Chapter II

WHY SMITH DOES NOT GO TO CHURCH

“ But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise.”—
MATT. xxii. 5.

THESE words are taken from one of Christ's most graphic parables. The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king who prepared a marriage for his son, and sent his servants forth to invite the guests to the feast. The invitation of the king was variously received. In one case they maltreated the royal messengers, while others who were called made light of the whole thing. Thus in all generations is the message of God

treated—some scorning it with anger and contempt, while others simply ignore it and treat it lightly. It is of this latter class, who tranquilly and complacently put aside the message of the King, that I am to speak now.

Let me preface my discussion by saying that I do not treat this subject of why Smith does not go to church, in any mere academic way. I have met Smith, and talked with him, and have tried to get his point of view, so as to represent him fairly and unbiasedly.

There are almost as many reasons why Smith does not go to church as there are Smiths. Some of them are superficial and puerile, used plainly as mere excuses ; others are serious and far-reaching, and are sincere and honest. Some of them are merely lame excuses on the part of Smith, offered to quiet a troubled conscience, and these I dismiss at once as not worth the time to discuss. I am concerned, in this inquiry, only with Smith's real, sincere

and honest reasons. And let me urge, at the very outset of our discussion, that we church-goers must beware of treating Smith in a cynical spirit, for that will only drive him farther from the church. Let us frankly admit that Smith *has* real, sincere and honest reasons for not going to church. This is the only way, in my judgment, that the church will ever win him. Nothing is more certain to widen the gap between Smith and the church than for the church-goer to assume the holier-than-thou attitude with him. We must meet Smith fairly, and honestly strive to get his point of view, if we are ever to win him.

I begin with what I believe to be the least important of the reasons why Smith does not go to church, namely, the faults of the church. Smith does not go to church because he sees so many glaring faults in the church.

He is thoroughly disgusted with the disagreements and discussions and squabbles that sometimes take place in the

church. It seems difficult for Christians to dwell together in peace. There are factions and cliques, quarrellings and petty bickerings that disgust Smith, as his wife tells him the story at the dinner table. And this seems to justify Smith in his favourite dictum that there is as much Christianity outside the church as within it. This surely is a sad commentary on the church, and one deeply to be deplored. But Smith makes the mistake here that so many make, in failing to understand clearly the character of the church. And while frankly admitting that there is very often just cause for Smith's charge, and without in the least attempting to excuse the church in this particular, it is well to remind Smith that although the church is the divine instrument for bringing in the kingdom of God upon the earth, it is a *human organization*, and like every other human organization is weak and faulty. Did Smith ever belong to any organization that was entirely free from dissensions and

petty bickerings and quarrellings? No, but Smith comes back at once with his answer that you do not expect as much of such organizations as you do of the church. True, but perhaps Smith expects *too much* of the church in this particular. The church is made up of the same kind of weak, faulty people that every other organization is made up of, and however deeply we regret it and deplore it, the simple fact is that the church, made up of weak, frail humans, is sure to be the victim of the failures of unsanctified human nature.

Again Smith does not think that the church is run as it should be, on the proper business basis. The church does not impress him as being an efficient organization that yields adequate returns upon the investment. He admires achievement, and does not think that the church is "justifying its claims." He does not connect the moral and reform movements which he sees in business and politics, with the church.

He complains that many thousands are tied up in ornate and expensive buildings that stand closed and useless for all but five or six hours a week. And he insists that "a one-day-a-week church," is a totally inadequate organization to Christianize the modern world. And I think Smith is right.

But these, and many like them, I believe, are merely superficial reasons why Smith does not go to church. They're not Smith's real reasons. They may be the reasons why he is not *interested* in the church, but they are not the reasons why he does not attend church. We must go deeper than this if we are to get at Smith's real reasons. One of the deeper causes—and I sympathize with Smith in this—is his knowledge that there are hypocrites in the church, and his belief that there are just as many good men outside the church as inside. So long as Smith is honest in this—and is not like so many non-church-goers, merely holding up this

time-honoured criticism as a shield behind which he may hide a troubled conscience, but earnestly and honestly feels that his experience and observation have led him to believe that there are no better men inside the church than outside it, and that he can be just as good a Christian outside as inside—then I am very anxious to meet Smith on his own ground and argue the question with him. This is a very common criticism thrown at the church, and the church must meet it fairly if it ever hopes to win Smith. Let it be frankly and regretfully admitted that there are many honest and sincere people who ought to be members of the church, but who will not openly connect themselves with it, because they have lost faith in the sincerity and integrity of some church members.

But let me remind Smith once again, that so long as human nature remains what it is, there can be no perfect organization this side of the millennium. There *are* hypocrites in the church, with sadness and

humiliation we admit it ; but it is well to remember that there are hypocrites in every organization under the sun. I own with sadness the damage that the inconsistent, hypocritical, unworthy member does the church of the living God. But I protest with indignation against the holding up of such hypocrites as fair specimens and examples of church members, as Smith is so often inclined to do. I claim that this is not only unfair and unjust, but that it is downright dishonest. If an Englishman should come over to America, and ask me to point out to him the splendid American oak of which he had heard so much, and of which we are so justly proud, and I should take him fifty miles out on Long Island and show him the gnarled, stunted, dwarfed scrub-oaks that grow there, and should say to him : " There is a specimen of the American oak," I should be doing a dishonest thing. To speak bluntly I should be lying to him. And yet this is the very thing that Smith is so apt to do with

reference to the hypocrites in the church. He picks out some little, mean, inconsistent, gnarled, scrub-oak church member, and pointing him out says : " There is a specimen of your church members ; so long as your churches are made up of men like that I won't have anything to do with the church." Now this is not only unfair and unjust to the church, but it is downright dishonest, for these hypocrites and inconsistent church members do not *represent* the Christian church. There are hypocrites in the church, but they are the exceptions and not the rule. The vast majority of the best men in the land are members of the church. Take any great city and make a list of the best and most influential citizens, and you will find that the large majority of them are inside the Church of Christ. And because the church, with all its defects, is the divinely ordained instrument for the setting up of the kingdom of God among men, every man who believes in that kingdom, and is in sympathy with the work

that the church is trying to do, ought to support the church and identify himself with it. I make my plea to Smith, who is right at heart, and who so often is in deepest sympathy with the things that the church stands for ; I make a plea not for an organization, but for the kingdom of God ; not for any local society, but for the church of the living God ! That you should support any particular church or any particular man, is of comparatively little moment ; but that you should support the cause of Christ and help forward the kingdom of God upon the earth, is of the utmost and vital importance !

But I hurry on to mention, as the last reason why Smith does not go to church, what I believe to be the real, true cause that keeps him away, namely, Smith does not feel the *need* of the church. I wonder if this is not more of an indictment against the church than against Smith ? Smith does not go to church because he does not feel the need of the church : he gets along

just as comfortably without it as with it. And here is a fact that ought not only to awaken Smith, but also to arouse the church! Let me tell Smith, kindly but firmly, that I believe with all my soul, that he can *not* get along without the church; that he does not fully realize what he is doing when he cuts the church, and that for which the church stands, out of his life. Let me remind him that his richest inheritance is due to the *church*; that the things that he is honestly proud of in his character, and that make him feel that he is just as good as those who are in the church, have come down to him *because* of the church through an ancestry that got *out* of the church the traits that they put into his blood, and that make him the man he is. While Smith is complacently congratulating himself that he is just as good as any man in the church, he entirely overlooks the fact that he is the man he is, because of some godly father or some saintly mother who, as loyal, devout members of the

church, walked the years with God. Holmes says somewhere that every man is an omnibus in which all his ancestors are sitting. What sort of a man would Smith be if he had had an ungodly ancestry? if there had not been instilled into his blood and wrought into the very fibre of his soul, the principles of integrity, faith, uprightness and nobility which have come down to him through the years, from true, sturdy, Christian forebears? As letters cut in the bark of a young tree grow and widen with age, so the impressions and bias that Smith got from a godly ancestry remain with him. John Randolph, the American statesman, once said: "I should have been an atheist if it had not been for one recollection—and that was the memory of the time when my departed mother used to take my little hands in hers, and cause me on my knees to say, "Our father, who art in heaven." The French historian, Michelet, makes the following touching reference to his mother in the preface to one of his most popular

books : " While writing all this, I have had in my mind a woman whose strong and serious mind would not have failed to support me in these contentions. I lost her thirty years ago ; nevertheless, ever living in my memory, she follows me from age to age. I owe her much. I feel deeply that I am the son of woman. Every instant in my ideas and words, I find again my mother in myself. It is my mother's blood which gives me the sympathy I feel for bygone ages." " A kiss from my mother," said West, " made me a painter." And Powell Buxton, the British philanthropist, writing to his mother, said : " I constantly feel, especially in action and exertion for others, the effects of principles early implanted by you in my mind."

The story is told of Thomas Carlyle, that not long before his death, he was in conversation with Dr. John Brown, and said to him : " I am now an old man, and done with the world. Looking around me, before and behind, and weighing all as wisely as

I can, it seems to me there is nothing solid to rest on but the faith which I learned in my old home, and from my mother's lips."

These testimonies and scores of others that can be produced, remind Smith that the inheritance which is his, and of which he is justly proud, is the inheritance of the *church* of the living God !

This tale is told of one of England's most forceful statesmen. Morning after morning he entered the old family gallery, and stood as if in worship before the ancestral pictures. He was heard to say again and again : " I will not forget, I will be true." His eldest son often watched him in awe and wonder. At the age of twelve his father took him with him one day and explained this daily exercise. He said to him : " You must hear these people speak." " What, father, can they say ? " Then his father, pointing to each picture, replied : " This one says be true to me. The second one says be true to thyself. The third one says be true to thy home. The last one, which is

my mother, says be true to God. I go out from them, my son, every morning, saying I will be true."

And if Smith is to pass down to *his* children and his children's children, principles and characters of which they will be proud in their day, he must give the church as real, if not perhaps as large, a place in his life as his forebears did in theirs.

And I ask Smith if, in those hours which come to him, as they come to every earnest life, when spirit triumphs over matter, and he catches the vision of the real significance of life, he does not feel, deep down in his soul, that the church is essential to his highest and noblest development! And I cannot help but feel—I hope he will pardon me for this if I hurt his feelings—that the fact that he insists that his children shall go to Sunday-school and church, is a practical confession that Smith really *does* feel that the church is worth while and necessary.

Chapter III

SMITH AND THE PREACHER

“That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.”—I JOHN i. 3.

AFTER listening to the sermon “Why Smith Does Not Go to Church,” a man wrote me as follows: “The question of Smith is an all-absorbing one to me, and in fact I presume I am, in the minds of many, bearing his name. So you see I was interested in following your argument for and against him. As I sat there in the pew following you, as you built up your argument, it seemed to me that when it was ended, you had left unsaid the two strongest arguments in favour of Smith, or in support of his reasons for remaining

away from church. These to my mind, and in my own case, are most often the *real* reasons, and not those that you gave. Smith stays away from church because the minister gives him no food for thought. To my mind the average minister of the gospel is incapable of giving thought to his listeners which really amounts to anything, and which is genuine common sense. The average business man is thinking keenly along business things through the week. Can he afford, when it comes Sunday, to go to church and listen to a lot of small argument and weak pleading which is far below his average value of week-day thought? He can see through all the sermon before it is preached, and gets no train of thought to follow, and hence nothing to keep his interest and make him think higher. You have placed all the fault in the pews and in the pews alone. You never once suggested that there might be a lack of interest and power in the pulpit. Real men love real, forceful talk, straight from the heart,

in which something is said. If Smith does not get this can you blame him for his attitude? "

That surely is a frank criticism, and I want you to answer it as frankly. "If Smith does not get this, can you blame him for his attitude? " he asks. No! no honest person can blame Smith for staying away from church if he gets nothing from the pulpit that will pay him for going. After listening to some sermons, I am filled with astonishment not that men stay away from church, but that they attend at all. In a symposium recently published on "Non-Church-Going," there occurs this blunt and severe arraignment of the average preacher: "Is the average pulpit to be taken seriously at all? When a bishop openly avows, after careful observation, 'I wonder how the laymen stand it,' one may be permitted to reply that the laymen do not stand it. They are conspicuous by their absence. The childish twaddle which does duty for numberless sermons is appreciated—mostly

for its brevity—by women and children. The average pulpit deliverance is neither calculated to convince the mind nor captivate the heart of the modern man in the street. Non-church-goers will assuredly demand something more virile and actual than what is generally to be heard if they are to be brought in.” While I believe that this criticism is too sweeping and covers more ground than is justified, still there is more truth in it than I wish there were. I want frankly to acknowledge the force of Smith’s criticism about preaching. More than this, I want to say frankly, that I deeply sympathize with Smith in this matter.

As I am trying to be fair with Smith in these sermons, and to put myself in his place and get his viewpoint, I want to take up his criticism of the preacher and frankly discuss it. I believe there is truth in the criticism that the average preacher is out of touch with men and the times. The question has been raised as to whether the

ministry is interpreting the divine idea to the twentieth century. It is said that the modern Egyptian doctor is accustomed to stand a long way from his patients, and to examine them with an opera glass. Many of the sermons that one hears preached would seem as though the preacher had imitated the Egyptian doctor. It is all so academic and remote from the real, vital issues of life. There is not a pulse of life nor a drop of red blood from start to finish ; all doctrinaire with nothing really human about it, and scarcely of any interest to the average man. In conversation recently with a non-church-goer, a college-bred man and a man of large business experience, he said to me : " I occasionally hear preachers give the reasons why we do not go to church, and why we think and feel as we do, and they do not come within a hundred miles of the truth." And then he added with great earnestness : " How can a preacher know what men are thinking about unless he rubs up against them, and talks with

them, and finds out just what they really *do* think and feel? ” There is much force in this criticism. Many a preacher lives with books rather than with men. The pulsations of life and the deep under-currents of the business world are all unknown to him. He too often sits apart and theorizes about life, instead of being an active participant in the red-blooded experiences that go to make up the daily living of the man on the street.

Too many a preacher is not far removed from the parish priest of whom some quaint poet has written :

A parish priest of Austerity

Climbed up in a high church steeple,
To be nearer God, so that he might hand
His word down to the people.

And now and again, when he heard the creak
Of the weather vane a-turning,
He closed his eyes and said, “ Of a truth
From God I now am learning.”

And in sermon script he daily wrote

What he thought was sent from heaven,
And he dropped this down on his people’s heads
Two times one day in seven.

In his age God said, "Come down and die";
And he cried from out the steeple,
"Where art Thou, Lord?" and the Lord replied,
"Down here, among My people."

It cannot be said with too great emphasis that the preacher must have a real, up-to-date message, if he is to win the attention and interest of Smith. The chief cause for the lack of power in the average preacher is his failure to impress his hearers with the truth that he really has a message of vital import to deliver. And this is a fatal lack, for Smith will pass him by with absolute indifference, unless he feels that the preacher has something really worth while to say, and believes in his own heart that it is worth while. The preacher that is to draw Smith must somehow impress him with the fact that he has received the truth he preaches direct from God. As Dr. Horton says in his "Yale Lectures," "This is the only justification of preaching at all. The man is set apart to address his fellow men, sometimes the men who are his equals or

superiors in knowledge and ability. Why should they listen to him? There is no reason why they should unless he has been in the secret cell of the oracle and has heard God speak. Has he not heard God's voice? Is he not repeating a message? Then assuredly he will fail. To be God's mouth-piece when God is not speaking through him, is a fraud of the palpable kind which men will not away with." The preacher has largely become the moralist who counsels, and is no longer the prophet who stands as God's spokesman with a living message for living men. Let some true messenger of God stand in the pulpit and utter God's truth to men in such fashion as to stir their deepest yearnings and meet their soul's needs, and it is strange how they will go to hear him. Smith is not found oftener in his pew because he does not get from the pulpit what he wants and feels that he needs. I remember going to listen, some years ago, to a noted preacher in Boston. I was greatly interested in the sermon,

which was a literary masterpiece and held the unabated attention of the congregation from start to finish. On my way home my friend asked me what I thought of the sermon, and I answered: "If I had gone to that service with a burden of sorrow or pain on my heart, or had been depressed or disheartened, I would have carried just as heavy a burden away from the church as I carried into it." And here is where the pulpit is to be put to its supreme test. Let Smith know that when he goes into the church burdened, or sad or discouraged, he will receive from the pulpit some message from the Christian's God that will lighten his burden, soothe his pain, and put new hope and courage into his fight, and he will be found in his pew on Sunday.

Men want to hear a simple, earnest gospel. I think we ministers make a serious mistake when we branch out into the fields of science or politics or economics. Smith often forgets more than the preacher ever knew about the things in his own field.

And when he wants the last word on these things, he will not go to the pulpit for it, for that is not what he goes to church for. He will no longer listen in patience to the "pulpit droning of old saws," nor the monotonous repetition of commonplaces. But let him know that when he goes to church he will get something that will pay him for going ; that he will get something from the pulpit that will interest him, and appeal to him, and that will hearten him for his life's work and struggle, and he will go to hear it.

Another thing that Smith insists upon is that the preacher shall be absolutely sincere in his preachment ; that he not only has a message to deliver, but that he genuinely and firmly believes his message. And it will not take Smith long to discover whether the preacher is sincere or not, for that is a kind of deceit that cannot be hid. Let the preacher stand up in the pulpit and pretend to be deeply in earnest when he is not, he will soon be detected and

despised by honest men like Smith. Nothing disgusts Smith more than mock gravity in the preacher ; the gravity that is assumed, and that is put on for the occasion, oftentimes to conceal a lack of thought and feeling. This is the type of preacher that Phillips Brooks compared, with fine sarcasm, to the chest of drawers which Mr. Bob Sawyer showed to Mr. Winkle in his little surgery : “ Dummies, my dear boy,” said he to his impressed, astonished visitor ; “ half the drawers have nothing in them, and the other half don’t open.”

In an editorial in the *New York Sun*, a number of years ago, commenting on a metropolitan preacher of note, the writer says : “ The whole trouble is that the Rev. Dr. ——— cannot induce people to believe because he himself does not believe. In place of religion he gives them only sentimental philanthropy, far removed from the essential thing he was commissioned to preach—the way to eternal salvation, beside which all earthly concerns are not

worth a moment's consideration." "That is the man for me," exclaimed David Hume, on hearing John Brown, of Haddington; "he means what he says; he speaks as if Jesus Christ were at his elbow." Let Smith feel that the preacher speaks as if "Jesus Christ were at his elbow," and he will be found in his pew on Sunday to listen to him.

I have a firm conviction that the average man wants what the gospel has to offer, and that when it is presented to him in a fresh, up-to-date, red-blooded way, he will go to hear it. For Smith, notwithstanding apparent facts to the contrary, is deeply interested in religion. I do not accept the statement frequently made, that the average man is indifferent to religion. I hold that men are genuinely interested in religion when it is presented to them in a virile, vital way. "After all," said Justice Holmes, of the United States Supreme Court, "the only interesting thing is religion." I believe there never was a time when the

earnest, commanding presentation of the truth, ever had a larger, heartier response than to-day. "What proportion of men do you think," asks a well-known writer, "wish to reason God out of existence or out of his world? How many are longing to disbelieve in immortality? How many of those even who break the commandments, wish to abolish them? How many would prefer to have Christianity proven a myth than an historical fact? Let us not wrong the temper of our age, however much we may share in its mental perplexities. I am confident that nothing would receive so true a welcome from the mind of this age, as some great vindication of religious faith." When the pulpit preaches a gospel that is timely and true to the facts of life, and gives Smith what he feels that he needs and must have to make him all that he wants to be and all that he might become, I have faith enough in Smith to believe that his pew will not be empty on Sunday.

Chapter IV

WHY SHOULDN'T SMITH PLAY GOLF INSTEAD OF GOING TO CHURCH ?

“ The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”—MARK ii. 27.

THAT is the clearest and most profound pronouncement on the Sunday question that ever was made. And if we can apply the principle of this declaration to the question in hand, we shall go a long way toward meeting Smith's argument in favour of Sunday golf.

If any one expects me to enter upon a tirade against Smith as a Sabbath-breaker he will be very much disappointed. That is certainly not the way to win Smith, and

I am earnestly anxious to win him. I am not here to sit in judgment upon Smith, much less abuse him. I want to put myself in his place, as far as possible, and see this question of Sunday from his viewpoint.

Why shouldn't Smith play golf instead of going to church? Well, why shouldn't he? Let us get Smith's side of it.

His reason, simply stated, is that he *needs* the recreation and exercise, the out-door life, the freedom and air, in his strenuous life. Smith is living a life of drive and nervous tension, that his father knew nothing of. He is carrying burdens, and is under a pressure that his father never dreamed of. If he is to qualify himself physically to meet these demands upon him, he must have more out-of-door life; more oxygen, more exercise, more activity. Sunday is the only day he can get these benefits. He is tied up tight six days under the modern drive of business, and must use Sunday for his day of exercise and out-door activity, or go without the benefit of the

out-of-door life. And he feels that it is better for himself and his family that he use his Sundays for clean, wholesome exercise, than that he should go to church. Not that he has anything especially against the church. He simply feels that he can make himself more fit for his week's work by taking Sunday as a day of exercise, than by going to church.

Now note that Smith is not doing anything in this that is *intrinsically* wrong. Surely there can be nothing more wholesome than what Smith is doing. He is very wise in considering his physical needs. It is right and laudable that Smith should build up his body. He cannot do the tasks assigned him in this strenuous life of his, unless he is physically fit. Let him neglect his body, forego all necessary exercise, and he breaks under the tremendous pressure and drive of this modern life. And I have no quarrel with Smith for the things that he is doing, for, in and of themselves, they are clean, wholesome, fine things. My

quarrel with Smith is for the things he is *not* doing. As I said in my opening chapter, it is right and wise that Smith should build up his physical life ; that he should do everything possible to keep a strong, healthy body. But when Smith develops muscle at the expense of soul, it is time to ask a few pertinent questions. I do not know where you can find a finer place as a refuge from care, worry and disease, than the golf course. It is one of the most wholesome retreats of the modern business man from indoor habits and often from indoor dissipations. But when the golf course is substituted for the church, it at once becomes a menace to the higher interests of a man's soul.

If there is anything that is clear and explicit in the teaching of Jesus with reference to the Sabbath, it is that he declares the Sabbath to be, not a *prohibition*, but a *privilege*. The Sabbath, according to the churchmen of Christ's day, was an end in itself, an institution sacred

and holy, hedged about by innumerable safeguards, and not to be violated in the smallest particulars without dire penalty. It was here that Christ broke with the churchmen of his day on the Sunday question, and declared that man was not made for the Sabbath but that the Sabbath was made for man. That it was not an *end in itself*, however sacred and holy, but that it was made for man a blessed, holy *privilege*, which man, by wise and earnest use, was to make the means of a higher and holier life. And it is the failure to grasp this far-reaching principle of our Lord, that the Sabbath is not a prohibition but a privilege, that has caused so much trouble and misunderstandings among honest people on this much discussed question. How many Smiths there are who have been permanently turned away from the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, because of some faithful but unwise parent, who held to the *prohibitory* character of the Sabbath. Henry Ward Beecher once said that he felt, on Sunday,

as though he were a pin-cushion, and that every Sunday duty was like sticking a pin into him. How keenly we can sympathize with this normal, wide-awake boy, who was brought up to look upon Sunday as a day of joyless burden.

If then I have rightly interpreted the Lord's pronouncement that the Sabbath is not a prohibition but a privilege, then the question for Smith to ask himself is this, "How shall I use this day of privilege to the best advantage for myself, for my family, and for society?" That is the question that Smith has to ask and answer about Sunday. How shall he use this great day of privilege? Surely not by going back to the old Puritan notion of a day of prohibition, in which he shall give the whole day to public and private exercise of worship. No, not that surely. Nor, on the other hand, by turning the day into one of merry-making and games. This is not to give either body or mind the best rest; it is not to give the life any real inspiration; and it is

generally to purchase a questionable pleasure by depriving one of needed rest and refreshment. I do not presume to tell Smith *how* he shall spend his Sundays, but I will say that the day is ill spent if it sends him back to his weekly work on Monday morning irritated, weary, reluctant ; and the day is well spent if it sends him back refreshed in body, mind, and spirit, to take up his round of daily duties and meet the obligations of his life, with a new inspiration of courage, hope and patience.

Now I assume that Smith is honestly anxious to live his life so as to reach his best and highest development. And the question I want to debate with him is, can he reach the development of his best by ignoring the Lord's day ? What is the best way for Smith to use Sunday ; to get the most out of it ? Smith says, " Of course I know what the preacher will say ; he will tell me the only way to spend Sunday is to spend it in church. But I don't agree with the preacher. I think I can get a good deal

more benefit playing golf in the open on a bright Sunday morning, than by going to church and listening to some of the preaching that I have been afflicted with in the past." Smith will not listen very patiently to the preacher when he tells him what he ought to do on Sunday. Well, forget the preacher for a moment, and listen to the scientist. Smith is always ready to listen to what Science has to say to him on any subject. Now what does Science have to say to Smith as to how he shall use Sunday? At the World's Exhibition in Paris in 1892, a medal was awarded for literature proving that man needs the weekly rest day. The medal was awarded to Dr. Haegler, of Basle, whose conclusions were accepted by medical science in general. He showed as a result of careful, scientific experiments, from examinations of the corpuscles of the blood, that the night's rest does not fully restore the day's waste, but needs to be supplemented by the weekly rest. A man does not take as full a breath when absorbed in work

as when at rest. Scientists estimate that a man breathes from one to two cubic inches less at each breath when at work than when at rest. Estimating on the basis of one and one-half inches per breath, for eighteen breaths per minute, there will be a loss of 12,000 cubic inches in eight hours of work, as compared to the same length of rest. Meantime the worker is using more oxygen than he breathes. The debt to nature thus made in a fair day's work is one ounce. He takes a full night's rest, but gets back only five-sixths of his lost ounce. So he runs through the week, a sixth of an ounce weaker every morning, until on Sunday morning he is six-sixths of an ounce short—a whole day behind. Nature is saying, "You need rest," just as loudly as on Saturday night, only, as sleep is just over, it must be the rest of changed occupation and changed thoughts, the rest of a general rest day. This full day's rest brings the worker up to his normal level again.

We are apt to think that a rest of twelve hours, with a sleep of about eight, fully recuperates us after a day of hard work at physical or mental labour or both. The microscope shows such a view to be wrong. Even twenty-four hours is not quite enough time. The microscope shows that more than thirty hours, possibly thirty-three or thirty-six, are needed to restore a cell to its proper size and conditions after severe fatigue. In other words, man is so made that he needs a Sabbath from Saturday evening to Monday morning of complete rest to be as good as new. Without this he is never at his best, physically, mentally, morally or spiritually. And the Fourth Commandment thus receives tremendous emphasis from the biological laboratory. Large manufacturers have been asked, "Who come to your works Monday in the best condition—the Sunday picnickers, or those who spend the day quietly in the church and the home?" And their answer is that the Sabbath-keeping people come

promptly and in condition for the best day's work of the week, while the Sunday picnickers come late or take a "blue Monday" off to rest from their Sunday pleasures.

Smith has listened to the scientist, let him listen to the statesman and the historian. What have they to say to him as to how he ought to spend his Sundays ?

The fact stands out through the history of nations, writ large so that he who runs may read, that a corruption of morals usually follows any profanation of the Sabbath. The Sabbath-keeping nations are the strongest, physically, mentally, morally, financially, politically. Let Smith ask the historian this question : " What would become of this country if the Christian churches were to be abolished ? " And his answer would be, " Immediately a deterioration of morals would ensue ; a tremendous slump in ideals would follow ; and all over the land the closed door of the church would be offset by a thousand open

doors of nameless degradation." Would Smith pronounce that a foolish and exaggerated prophecy? Well, then let me give him a striking corroboration within his own memory. Three or four years ago one of the leading papers in New York made an exhaustive examination into the political morals of a certain State. It had been alleged that politically the State was rotten, that its votes were regularly bought and sold at every election. A detailed description of each of the most corrupt towns in that State was given, and this was the startling fact brought out: "The worst towns, where bribery was most persistent, where illegal liquor-selling was most rampant, where immorality was most flagrant, were those towns in which there was no resident minister and where no Christian service was regularly held. In one town known as 'darkest Exeter,' there were, twenty years ago, six churches; four of them are in ruins to-day, two are occasionally used, but there is no resident minister. The result is

'darkest Exeter,' a New England farming town, once peopled by the sturdy sons of the Pilgrim, heir to all the noble qualities of a sturdy race." Here is evidence only a year or two old, gathered not from China or India, but from the very heart of New England. And in the face of this evidence every man who habitually refuses to recognize and keep the holy Sabbath, is helping along to the limit of his personal influence, the degradation of life for the entire country. No matter how good a man he may be in his own life, or how correct his personal morals, his influence in refusing to conserve the Sabbath is a direct contribution to the corruption of the nation. Smith is mostly looking at his question in a personal way. He asks himself, Will it harm *me* to use Sunday as a day of amusement? But Smith must go further than this: he must ask that deeper question, How will my use of Sunday affect *others*? No man has a right to do anything which, if *all* followed his example, would do more harm than good.

Now, Smith has listened to the scientist, the historian, and the statesman, perhaps he will be willing to listen, for a moment, to the preacher. And what has the preacher to say to Smith on this question as to how he shall use Sunday? Just this, the familiar, trite, commonplace statement, that Smith has a *soul* as well as a body, and that unless he nurtures it, it will shrivel and die. It is just as necessary to cultivate the soul as it is to cultivate the mind or the body. Like the faculty of reason or judgment, the religious sense becomes strong through culture and exercise, or weak through neglect or want of nourishment.

“If I neglect my practice for a day, I see the difference in my execution; if for two days, my friends see it; and if for a week, all the world knows my failure.” So wrote Malibran, the great Spanish singer.

Charles Darwin tell us how in youth he was exceedingly fond of poetry and music. But for twenty years he gave

every possible moment of his time and every particle of his strength to the study of roots and seeds and flowers, of eggs and birds and beasts. And at the age of fifty, Darwin discovered that his love of music and poetry had faded away through disuse. In the latter days of his life, when he needed the relaxation of song and drama, he wrote very pathetically: "If I had to live my life again I would have made a rule to read some poetry and to listen to some music once every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use." And with sincere sorrow does the great scientist refer to the decline of his spiritual faculty. "It may be truly said," he writes, "that I am like a man who has become colour-blind. Disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but it was at last complete." Pathetic in the extreme, is this sad confession of the damage that this great man did his own soul, by neglecting its rightful claims.

We are fast forgetting that Sunday is the

great brooding day of the soul. And the problem of our day is the problem of the revival of the spiritual faculty in order to bring life to its best and highest development. The well-known novelist, Mrs. Edith Wharton, tells somewhere of a husband who listened at every door in his wife's life, and never heard a sound within. I have imagined God listening at every door of Smith's soul, and not catching a single sound of holy aspiration. When a gentleman was inspecting a house in Newcastle, with a view to renting it, the landlord took him to an upper window, and said : " You can see Durham Cathedral from this window on Sunday." " Why on Sunday above any other day ? " inquired the man. " Because on that day there is no smoke from those tall chimneys," was the answer. Every man who is to live his life to his best and highest, needs a vision. No man is fit to live who does not catch a vision of the thing he is meant to be, and of the God who made him.

A clergyman once called upon a cobbler, and as he entered the little cramped room and looked about at the limited quarters, he asked, "Don't you feel imprisoned in this little place?" "Oh, no," he answered, "I just open the door," which opened toward the sea. "When I open that door and look out over that great sea, I can come back to my boots," he said, as he busied himself with his work. The peril that Smith is in danger of in using his Sundays on the golf course, is that he shall have no spiritual outlook, no open door that looks toward the sea.

Professor Peabody, of Harvard, sounds a note of needed warning when he says :

"The real peril of the age is the possibility that among the engrossing interests of modern life there shall be no outlook at all ; no open window of the mind, no holy city of the soul, the shutters of life closed, the little things crowding out the great ones, and the soul all unaware of the sunshine and landscape which lie at its very door.

That is the materialism from which any life might pray to be set free, the practical materialism which curses American life—the shut-in, self-absorbed, unspiritualized, unhallowed life, the life without ideals, the windows toward Jerusalem closed and barred, and the man within so busy that he has no time to look out to any distant tower of a sanctifying thought.”

May God save Smith from such a fate as this !

Chapter V

SMITH IN GOD'S OUT-OF-DOORS

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."—HEB. x. 25.

WE are so accustomed to think of non-church-going as a modern complaint that we are surprised to learn that even the early Christian Church suffered from a like trouble. Whoever the author of this epistle may have been, he felt it necessary, writing probably within the first Christian century, to urge his Christian readers not to forget to go to church. After all, human nature is pretty nearly the same all along the line.

After listening to the preceding sermon,

“ Why Shouldn't Smith Play Golf Instead of Going to Church ? ” a man wrote me as follows : “ Isn't a man justified in spending the Sabbath in the open if he can do so with a clear conscience, and truly worship at the same time ? The pressure of modern times, which we cannot alter, establishes a physical reason for his seeking the out-of-doors. His week is filled with hurry and bustle, and strain and worry. He is indoors, out of God's sunshine, feeling his muscles becoming stiff and tired, and feeling the spirit of youth and happiness slipping away from him. He longs for his Sundays when he can go out-of-doors, be thankful for life, love all God's beauty, and fill his lungs with God's own breath. Our times have changed, why shouldn't our form of religion change too ? I do not mean this for all, but just for Smith. Why is he not justified in his choice ? ”

That is a frank and honest inquiry, and I am going to try to answer it as fairly and frankly as I know how. “ Is it not possible

to worship God in His out-of-doors, as well as in church?" Smith asks. My answer is, "Yes, surely possible, but not *probable*." It is possible for a man to become a thoroughly educated man without ever having entered a school or a college. But it has rarely happened. Abraham Lincoln is a case in point. He went to school "by littles," as he says. "I never went to school more than six months in my life," he tells us. A school-house was of comparatively little importance in Lincoln's education. "I can remember," he says, "going to my little bed-room, after hearing the neighbours talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their sayings. I could not sleep, although I tried to, when I got on such a hunt for an idea, until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over, until I had put it in language plain enough, as

I thought, for any boys I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me ; for I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north and bounded it south, and bounded it east and bounded it west." His stock of books was small, but he knew them thoroughly. He once told a friend that he " read every book he had ever heard of in that country, for a circuit of fifty miles." He would write on a board, or use the wooden fire-shovel ciphering with a charred stick. His biographer tells us that he read and worked as long as it was light, and then stuck his book in a crack of the logs to have it near when he woke with the dawn. Even when ploughing, while resting his horse at the end of the long furrow, he would be perched on stump or fence with a book. And so Lincoln became a thoroughly educated man, and the greatest master of pure English that America has ever produced. He stands out as a rare and shining example of the

self-educated man. But I presume that no one would be foolish enough to claim that because Lincoln had only six months of schooling in his life, any man may become thoroughly educated without ever going near a school or a college. Lincoln demonstrates clearly that it is possible, but history shows as clearly that it is very rare.

So I would answer Smith when he asks, "Isn't it possible for me to worship God in His out-of-doors just as truly as in church?" "Why, yes, possible surely, but not *probable*." And experience and observation show that it rarely happens.

I would call Smith's earnest attention to the significance and value of the gathering together of congenial spirits for mutual interests and for a common purpose, in the house of God. The psychology of the crowd is a most interesting and fascinating study. Crowds have played a most important and vital part in the history of nations. Gustave Le Bon, in that remarkable book, "The Crowd," declares, "While all our

ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase." And he goes on to say that "it is by *association* that crowds have come to procure ideas with respect to their interests and have arrived at a consciousness of their strength."

Why do political leaders make so great and frequent use of the mass meeting? Because they understand full well the value of the crowd: the force that comes from hundreds or thousands of people, impelled by a common purpose, and sharing mutual feelings and ideas, coming together under a common impulse. Smith, no doubt, has more than once been swept away by the contagious enthusiasm of the crowd, and thrown his hat in the air at a football match, or jumped upon a chair in a political mass meeting. There is a subtle and indescribable atmosphere about a crowd, that

every thoughtful person recognizes and feels. Everybody knows how the gathering of people together for some common purpose is often the necessary essential for moving them to action. That is why it is so much easier to arouse men and enlist their interest and support by gathering them together in numbers and stirring their common emotions, than by taking them separately and apart and trying to win them one by one.

This is one of the strongest reasons why Smith, if he really desires to worship God, should go to church to do so. The subtle atmosphere of a company of united worshippers, all seeking the same end and sharing a common service, makes itself felt and unconsciously helps to bring Smith into a spirit of real worship. Mr. Beecher in his "Norwood," has a remarkably fine and human touch in describing the close of Sunday morning's service in the village church. The village horse jockey and doctor have just driven up, and are waiting

for the congregation to come out. While the jockey is pointing out to the doctor the comparative merits of the neighbour's teams standing in the horse-shed, the congregation begins to sing the closing hymn. "There, doctor, there's the last hymn!" It rises upon the air, softened by distance and the inclosure of the building, rises and falls in regular movement. Even Hiram's tongue ceases. The bird, in the top of the elm, hushes its shrill snatches. Again the hymn rises, and this time fuller and louder, as if the whole congregation has caught the spirit. Men's and women's voices, and little children's are in it. Hiram says, without any of his usual pertness, "Doctor, there's somethin' in folks singin' when you are outside the church that makes you feel as though you ought to be inside."

I know nowhere in literature a finer touch, or truer, of the atmospheric influence of the church service.

One has explained the philosophy of friendship as the basis of a common

experience. "To have had common school traditions, to have carved initials in the same old oak, to have shared a common task, to have suffered a common grief or known a like joy, these are the things upon which, as on the solid rock, are builded the foundations of real and lasting friendship." The two things in life, priceless above rubies, are faith and love; and these are most surely nurtured by a common worship in the church of God. David, in that wonderful poem of his, the *De Profundis* of the soul, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" points out the way back again to the light, by recalling the hours when, with the multitude, and with "the voice of joy and praise," he kept holy day in the house of the Lord. There is something in the sacred fellowship of kindred souls, in the dear associations of the church of God, where, in times of joy and sorrow, we have been comforted, upbuilded, enheartened, made brave to face an uncertain to-morrow, by the singing together of some

familiar hymn, or the mellowing influence of some earnest prayer, or the tender message of some man of God, that has made the church of the living God one of the dearest places in our life. It was under the influence of something like this that George Romanes, that brilliant scientist, who, through the years of his middle manhood wandered from the faith of his fathers, but came back at last to the church of his childhood, was led to exclaim: "After all, it is the Christians that have the pull."

One of the deepest and most universal facts of human life is man's "perpetual need of intercourse and fellowship." Man is so made that he craves communion. But how can men have communion save through some medium of fellowship? There must be some common interest, or common purpose, or common ideal, to hold men together. This explains why men are gathered together in various groups and companies. A oneness of purpose, or a sympathy and co-operation in a common

cause, gathers them into great or small communions. The "communion of the saints," has ever been the strongest instance of the helpfulness and power of a united body.

I believe in finding God in nature and worshipping Him in His wonderful world. Many and many a time have I had my heart strangely moved, as I have gazed, enwrapped, upon some noble mountain range, or stood by the lip of the sea, or watched, spell-bound, the prismatic glory of a sunset, or been hushed into reverent silence by the ravishing beauty of the starry heavens. I understand what the poet meant when he wrote,

"I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

And at such times I have truly and reverently worshipped the God of the anemone

and the sparrow, the running brook and the overarching sky. But mostly, I have done my worshipping in the church of God, and I imagine that Smith does not differ from me in this particular. He and I give glad assent to those fine words of Mrs. Browning's :

“ Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush
Afire with God ;
But only he who sees
Takes off his shoes.”

I wonder how often Smith “ takes off his shoes,” when spending his Sundays in God's out-of-doors ? Wonderful and beautiful and worship-provoking as God's out-of-doors is, it cannot take the place of the house where His honour dwelleth. “ There are few men,” said the president of one of our leading educational institutions not long since, “ whose spiritual senses will not be quickened, whose inspirations will not be elevated, whose religious

ideals will not be ennobled, by the fellowship with his brethren which the Christian church offers." And I wonder if Smith ever fully realizes that by neglecting the church and the worship of God, he is losing, for ever, something of priceless value from his life ?

Chapter VI

SMITH JR.

“Amon walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served.”—
II KINGS xxi. 21.

THAT is practically all we know about this man Amon, who was the son of Manasseh, King of Judah. He sat only two years on the throne of Judah, and was assassinated by court conspirators in his palace. The only value to us, in the brief mention of this king, is the fact that he took his cue from his father, and did as his father had done before him. This fact modernizes him, and points the moral. It is the fact that mostly our children do

as we parents do, that makes parenthood so big with responsibility.

In a letter sent me the other day, a man asks, "What objection have you to Smith's sending his children to church when he does not attend himself?" I have this objection: that that is not the way for Smith to get his children to go to church. If Smith wants his children to attend church—and he generally does—the most effective way to get them there is to go himself. And this brings up one of the most vital points in our whole discussion, namely, the influence of Smith in the matter of church attendance upon Smith Jr. I think that Smith himself feels this aspect of the case even more strongly than he is always willing to admit. Said a man to me some time ago, whose wife and children attend church, "I am beginning to think more about church in these days than I have for some time. My boy is growing up and he is beginning to ask questions. He wants to know why father doesn't go to church with

mother? I feel that it is time for me to do something." This shows how deeply Smith feels concerning the influence he exerts over his children. And I want to speak a plain word to Smith about the effect of his influence in the matter of church attendance upon Smith Jr.

At times I look forward to the church of the future with the gravest apprehensions. The boys and girls of to-day are to make up the church of to-morrow. I note with sadness the falling away from church attendance of the young people, our boys and girls. And I ask myself the question, "What is to become of the church of the future if the boys and girls of to-day, upon whom the church must draw its adherents and support, do not grow up in the church to take the places of those who are doing its work and bearing its burdens?" Unless we can hold our boys and girls in loyalty to the church, the beginning of the end is already in sight. It is this aspect of the question that lays a heavy obligation upon

the parent, and that Smith may not lightly throw off. A few years ago the whole Christian community was shocked by the bare and bold utterance of a speaker at a liquor dealer's convention, urging saloon keepers to compensate for the annual mortality of drinking men by luring new levies of boys to the bar. Almost inconceivably base as the motive was, the theory and advice of the speaker were sound. If the saloon of to-morrow is to live and thrive, it must lay hold of the boys of to-day to fill the place of the poor derelicts of humanity that lie shipwrecked and ruined along the shore. Shall not the Church of Christ be as wise and as far-seeing as the public house? The church must win the boys, and it is not winning them. They are not at its services; the vacant seats on the "boys' side" of the Sunday-school are the despair of the superintendent. If we are to save the men we must begin by saving the boys, and Smith has a part in this great task, whether he thinks he has or not.

It is a very difficult problem as to just how far a parent ought to coerce his children in the matter of church-going. Doubtless, we can all call to mind instances where great and irreparable harm has been done in alienating the boy or the girl from church—especially the boy—and turning them against religion, by an unwise insistence in the matter of church attendance. This is a question that has perplexed many an anxious and devout parent, and filled his soul with biting anxiety.

The solution of the problem, as far as there can be any solution, lies, I believe, mostly in the matter of personal influence. The maxim, "Do as I say, and not as I do," may be a clever ruse on the part of Smith to relieve him from an unpleasant dilemma, but it will not succeed with his boy. While the boy will give serious heed to what Smith *says*, because he must, he is far more powerfully influenced by what Smith *does*. And though Smith Jr. may never have read Emerson, he is actuated

to the letter by that philosopher's dictum !
"What you are, speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say." And just the moment Smith begins to talk about his boy and the church, the question of parental influence bulks bigger than anything else. The simple truth is that the reason why our boys and girls do not go to church, is because their parents do not go. I was talking the other day with a business man who had fallen gradually into the suburban habit of staying away from church. And he confessed to me that his conscience troubled him when he thought of his boy. He said, "I find my boy is anxious to stay at home from church with his father." And to *leave* the matter of church-going, as Smith is in the habit of doing, for his boy to settle for himself, may sound all right in theory but breaks down badly in practice. It reminds me of the incident reported about Coleridge and an English statesman who were discussing the question of how far a parent ought to interfere with his child's

religion. The statesman was arguing that the only wise and right thing to do was to wait till your boy was old enough and then let him decide for himself. Leading his friend into the garden, Coleridge said to him, "I have decided not to put out any vegetables this Spring, but to wait until the Summer and let the garden decide for itself whether it prefers weeds or strawberries."

Smith cannot be indifferent to the church and expect Smith Jr. to be interested. The boy is an imitator ; his life is largely made up of imitating. He imitates the things he sees his parents do, and he voices the things he hears his parents say. More than that, the boy is a hero-worshipper, and if his father is worthy of it—and Smith usually is—he idealizes and idolizes him ; makes him his hero. Whatever father does is right in his eyes, and he is ready to take up wagger of battle the instant anyone challenges the perfection of his hero. As a boy proudly said of his father, "If my

father says it's so, it's so even if it isn't so." The normal boy looks upon his father—provided always that his father is worthy of his boy's confidence—as the best and greatest man living. He believes so tremendously in him that no one can convince him that his father ever does anything wrong. Whatever his father does is right and worthy of imitation. And it is at this point that Smith is doing the greatest damage, next to the damage he is doing himself, by ignoring the church and the claims of religion. He is, all unwittingly no doubt, leading Smith Jr. to ignore the church and become indifferent to the claims of religion. In Sparta when a boy committed a crime, his father was punished. It is time for Smith to pause here, and ask himself one or two serious questions. And one of the questions he needs to ask is, "How far am I responsible for the kind of man Smith Jr. is going to be?"

And I want to remind Smith that the greatest chance he will ever have with his

boy is just at this time when his boy is setting him up as his model and hero. For it is at this time that Smith Jr. is passing through the critical period of his life. It is the time when he is most susceptible to influence, and when the example and precept of his father count most with him. Experts on boy life all agree that adolescence is the critical period of life, the strategic point in the career of a soul. "It is the time of change. By fifteen the brain stops growing, the large arteries increase one-third, the temperature rises one degree, the voice deepens, the stature grows by bounds, and the body needs more sleep and food than ever before." And side by side with this change in the body there is taking place as marked a change in the boy's mind and soul. It is the time when a "change comes o'er the spirit of his dream," and he is gradually possessed with the feeling that "there is something about himself that needs to be settled." It is the emotional and enthusiastic age, and the boy begins

to daydream and make large plans. It is the time when he begins to create his ideals and follow them.

Happy the father who, in this critical and strategic period, becomes his boy's best friend and hero. The influence he can wield over him is well-nigh incalculable. He may mould him at his will. One part, and perhaps the biggest part, of the price that the average business man of this modern day has to pay in order to keep up with the pace of the times, is that he does not become very well acquainted with his boy. He is so busy trying to make money to give him a fair start in life that he does not have the chance to know much about him. He does not know who his companions are, how he spends his time, what his aims or ideals are, or what principles he is absorbing during these critical years. Most important of all, very often the father does not have his boy's confidence. What a great chance a father throws away here! Yet, by keeping close to his

boy and entering into his life, he can do almost anything with him and mould him as the potter moulds the clay. It is a great thing when the boy prefers the company of his father to that of any other. It is well worth all it costs for a father to get close to his boy, and become his best friend and most cherished companion. Then he can "talk religion" to him and the boy will listen eagerly. I imagine many a father would be simply amazed at the zest and appetite of his boy for such matters and at the power of his influence over him.

And what I think Smith needs to feel is that there is resting upon him a binding obligation to give personal attention to the moral and religious training of his boy. Smith is often inclined to shirk this duty. He tries to persuade himself, and no doubt honestly believes, that the mother can do this work a great deal better than the father. But there is something in the masculinity of the father that appeals more

strongly to the average boy than does the tenderness and sympathy of the mother. In that beautiful story in the Gospels, where children are brought to Jesus, we have been wont to think that the mothers brought them. But Bible students tell us that the customs of the time and the habits of the people, as well as the pronoun used in the account, proves that it was the fathers and not the mothers that brought them. And notwithstanding the fact that his mother is quite likely to be more religiously inclined than his father, still Smith Jr. is far more influenced, in the matter of church-going, by his father than by his mother.

The Sunday question is a very complex one, and I am frank to say that I am by no means clear just where the line ought to be drawn in the matter of Sunday diversion. I am not prepared to say that the father who takes his children out in his motor on a Sunday is doing wrong, or that under certain circumstances it may not be

justifiable and right. But I never see it done without thinking of the risk that the father takes of damaging the sanctity of the Sabbath in his children's eyes. But of this I am positive: anything that we parents do to lower the sanctity of God's day in the thought of our children, to ignore our churchly duties and moral obligations, may result in irreparable damage to our children.

So I would say to Smith, that if he wants Smith Jr. to go to church—and he does—he must see to it that he goes himself. It is not enough to send Smith Jr. to church, you must bring him.

I was talking several years ago with a gardener who was working for a farmer in the mountains, raising produce for the local hotels. The farmer made a failure of the venture, and in speaking about it the gardener said: "He wasn't the right kind of man to succeed; he kept telling us to go here and to go there. The man to succeed mustn't say 'Go,' he must say 'Come.'" There is a deep philosophy in

that countryman's criticism and we may well apply it to ourselves in the matter of the church. If Smith wants Smith Jr. to go to church on Sundays, he must not say to him "Go," while he lingers over the Sunday newspaper or goes to the golf club. But he must say to his boy "Come," and by his example more than by his precept, ensure his boy's interest in the church of God.

The family pew, with the father at the head of it, will have an influence upon the spiritual life of childhood that will be permanent and far-reaching. And I believe that Smith would be a better father, if he would occupy the family pew oftener. Smith, bring Smith Jr. with you to the church on Sundays ; train him up in the habit of church-going by loving persuasion and godly example, and Smith Jr. will be safe, and so will the church.

Chapter VII

IS SMITH WRONG OR THE CHURCH ?

“ There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”—PROV. xiv. 12.

THE figure is that of a journey. The traveller imagines that he is pursuing a path which will lead him to his desired goal of success and happiness. But some day he discovers that it leads to ruin. It is one of the easiest things in life to mistake a false path for a true one ; and very often a man thoughtlessly and carelessly pushes along a way that will some day lead to his undoing. It is a mistake we often make, to think that if something appears to us to be not positively

sinful, it cannot be very far astray from the plain path of rectitude. It is not necessary to live a flagrantly wicked life to destroy one's soul. That which is wrong will destroy the soul whether it is wrought out with gentility and refinement or flaunted openly and offensively. "In tropical forests trees grow whose branches are infested with parasitic growths, some of which blossom into gorgeous flowers, while others develop loathsome fungi and cankers ; yet, flowers or cankers, both live upon the vitality of the tree and equally destroy it." Now from this it can be deduced that it is possible for a man to be wrong and not realize it : to be following a fatally unwise course and think that he is on the highway to success and happiness.

Now who is wrong, Smith or the church ? If you were to ask Smith, he would probably answer, "the church." He has frankly admitted that he is indifferent to the church, and that he can get along just as well without it. He tells you frankly and without

reserve, just why he does not care for the church, nor feel any special obligation resting upon him to attend it and co-operate with it. He points out its limitations and short-comings. He says it is not efficient, that it is not doing its work ; he complains that the preacher does not know men, is not in touch with the really vital things in life, that his preaching is academic and does not grip men and lay hold of them as live preaching ought to. He says he cannot trace the moral reforms in business and politics and in the life of the world in general, to the work and influence of the church. If you were to sit down and argue with him, Smith could draw up a long list of items in his indictment against the church. And without doubt he could make out a strong case.

Now I would not be so foolish as to say that Smith's criticisms, some of them at least, perhaps many of them, are not justified. It will never do the church any good to make pretensions that cannot be

maintained. He is not the best or wisest defender of the church who hotly resents all and every criticism urged against it, and tries to make out for it a perfectly clean bill of health. Every one who has the best interests of the church most deeply at heart must admit that the church has its faults, and frankly recognize its limitations and shortcomings. Surely I would not throw down wage of battle with Smith at *this* point. Let me only remind him of what I said earlier in this discussion, that the church is a human organization, and like every other human organization is subject to the weaknesses and faults of frail human nature.

Frankly admitting, then, the faults and shortcomings of the church, I want to ask Smith a plain question or two. We have been discussing the church, let us look at Smith for a while. I would like to put Smith on the witness stand for a moment, if he does not object, and cross-examine him. Not in any holier-than-thou spirit,

for I am very sure that the defender of the church will make no headway with Smith in any such spirit, but simply to ask him a question or two in the interests of the merits of our discussion.

Now, Mr. Smith, suppose that everything that you have urged against the church is true ; concede that the case may be even stronger than you have stated it ; are *you* blameless ? Have *you* no obligations in the matter of the church, that are binding ? You have said, Mr. Smith, that you were perfectly indifferent on the question of the church ; that you had nothing especially against the church, but that you did not feel the need of it. You have been very frank, and have unhesitatingly admitted that you did not take much time to think about the church, or about religion, or about your own soul. Now let me ask you, Mr. Smith, is that the fault of the *church* or are you yourself to blame for this ? Have you ever honestly tried to use the church for your own highest and holiest

development? Have you ever given the church a fair *chance* to make itself a potent force in your life?

And here I wish to drive home upon Smith what I believe is the really vital issue at stake in this whole discussion. Has Smith ever really *tried* to cultivate an interest in religion?

I have a friend, a member of a large and successful business house, a Scotchman by birth, who told me the following incident of his boyhood days in Scotland. When about fourteen years of age, the age at which boys feel that they are getting too big for Sunday-school, he began to associate with two or three somewhat ungodly boys, who laughed at him for going to Sunday-school. One Sunday morning he came down late to breakfast and seemed to be making no preparations for Sunday-school, and in answer to his mother's question as to why he was not getting ready, replied that he was not going to Sunday-school any more. "You are not going any more?" answered

his mother. "How's that?" "What's the use?" he replied in a somewhat braggadocio tone. "You get no good at Sunday-school." His mother, who was a fair type of the sturdy, shrewd Scotch race, noticing at once the new spirit in the words of her boy, and eyeing him closely, said to him: "You get no good at Sunday-school, eh? Well, you go and get your bonnet and go to Sunday-school, and if you get no good there, you put yourself in the way of it." And my friend confessed to me that many a time since, the words of his wise old mother had come back to him and been a real help to him through life.

I would like to ask Smith if he has ever really "put himself in the way." of the good that the church could do him? Has he not been content to live a life of earthly good cheer, ministering to his own selfish whims and desires, making it his plan to get all he can out of the world without any serious thought as to what he is putting into the world? And then does he venture,

as an excuse for his neglect of the higher values of life, and his neglect of the means which the church of the living God offers him, to point out the faults and shortcomings of the church as the reason for his indifference and neglect? And are the excuses that Smith uses altogether valid? Do they really bear on the case at all? Do they touch the really vital things in his deepest life? Do they satisfy Smith himself in those moments, when an awakened conscience sets him over against the deepest facts in life, and drives "the sharp edge of the interrogation point" deep into the fibre of his very soul? When Smith answers some of these questions, his attitude toward the church is quite likely to be modified.

I would like to ask Smith, if criticizing the church has not been nearly all that he has done in this matter of the church. Am I unfair to Smith when I ask him if not infrequently his criticism of the church has been merely a shield behind which he has sought to hide a troublesome conscience?

There can be no doubt that the church needs criticizing at points, and that it could profit by plain, wholesome criticism. But is Smith's criticism of the church actuated by a spirit of real helpfulness, or does he criticize often because the church makes him feel uncomfortable, and he can relieve his discomfort in this way? The story is told of an interview that Lincoln had with some gentlemen who were criticizing his administration of the government during the dark days of the Civil War. He is reported to have said, after listening to the judgments of his critics :

"Suppose all the property you were worth was in gold, and you had put it in the hands of Blondin to carry across the Niagara Falls on a tight-rope. Would you shake the rope while he was passing over it, or keep shouting to him, 'Blondin, stoop a little more,' 'Go a little faster?' No, I am sure you would not. You would hold your breath as well as your tongue, and keep your hands off until he was safely over.

Now, the government is in the same situation, and is carrying across a stormy ocean an immense weight, untold treasures are in its hands. It is doing the best it can ; don't badger it ; keep silence and it will get you safely over."

And in a like spirit I would say to Smith, the church is confronting problems to-day that almost stagger its faith and make its heart grow faint. It is face to face with tasks that call for the highest wisdom, the greatest courage, and the stoutest hearts. It is carrying across stormy and troublous times values of immense worth to the world. Do not badger it ; do not heckle it ; do not tear down ! Encourage it, help it, cheer it, lend a hand ! It needs the sympathy and help of every earnest, honest man. It stands for too much in the life of men, and has *interests* which are too vital committed to its charge, for any man who desires to see the world made better, and the great problems of our modern day satisfactorily worked out, to lay upon it careless, thoughtless

or irreverent hands! The church needs *you*, Smith, almost as much as you need the church. And when you hold aloof from it, when you deprive it of your influence, your help and your sympathetic co-operation, you wrong it deeply and vitally.

But that is not the whole, nor the greater part, of the story. By ignoring the church Smith wrongs himself more deeply and more vitally than he can possibly wrong the church. Has Smith ever stopped, in his easy, indifferent life, when pursuing pleasure on the Lord's day, to consider what harm he is doing himself by ignoring the claims of religion, and by holding himself aloof from the house of the Lord? I said, earlier in our discussion, that I assumed that Smith desired to reach his best and highest development. But has Smith ever really *tried*?

Very much of the power and influence of Smith's life is dissipated and wasted. He has within him powers that he has never used. Never yet has he walked the high places of his life. Never yet has he

approached the summit of his being. Never yet has he caught the full vision of what he might become.

“ All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
That was I worth to God.”

Smith has never yet caught the full vision of what life means for him. He has never looked aloft to those heights, ascent to which is possible for him. A traveller, visiting the city of Lyons, was told that from the height of Fourvieres, he could see the Alps. Climbing the height toward the close of the day, he looked vainly into the mists that were gathering over the broad plain beyond. “ Look higher ! ” they called to him. And looking up into the clear blue, there, full seventy miles away, lit by the rays of the setting sun, he beheld the glorious domes of the snow-crowned Alps. Smith can never reach unto the full measure of his powers, can never approach what God meant him to be, until, looking toward the heights, he catches the vision divine. It

is not what man *is* that exalts him, but what he *might* become. And though in striving for the summit he fall short of the heights, this is his consolation, this his inspiration :

“ What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me.”

It is said that Ole Bull, the famous violinist, was seen one day standing far out on a point of rocks that jutted out into the open sea, drawing the bow across the strings of his violin. Asked, on his return, what he was doing, he answered, that he was listening to the great undertone of the sea, and trying to reproduce it on his violin. So every man, if he is to strike high music from his life, must stand on “ some promontory of dedication,” and listen with all his soul, for the great divine undertone, and then, catching it, try and reproduce it in his life. Only thus can he live “ open-doored to God,” and walk the heights

And this is why I think that Smith is wrong, when he is indifferent to, and ignores, the church of the living God.

Chapter VIII

WHAT SHALL THE CHURCH DO ABOUT SMITH ?

“Ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.”—
II COR. iv. 5.

WE come now to the close of our discussion on Smith and the church, and in this final chapter we touch the most vital part of our discussion. I shall try to answer the far-reaching question, “What shall the church do about Smith ?” It is very easy and simple to criticize and point out defects, but a far different matter to suggest remedies. I surely have no final word on this question that the church has been so anxiously debating for the past

decade or two. I desire to record some personal observations and convictions that seem to me to lie along the path that the church must take if it is ever to win Smith.

Let me begin by making two general remarks.

First, the church must recognize the fact that it is confronting entirely changed conditions and new problems, and that it must adapt itself to the changed conditions, if it expects to hold its influence and power in our modern day. There is "a new face at the door of our modern life, a new situation which has stolen upon us with the swiftness of a thief in the night." It is simply folly for the church to sit down and bewail what we are wont to call the good old days when all classes flocked to the church on the Lord's Day. It is ours to recognize the changed conditions, to meet them fairly and to master them. It is not within my purpose now to discuss the question of these changed conditions, but I simply desire in passing, to register my conviction, that

though the Church of Christ is confronted to-day with the deepest problems and the mightiest tasks that it has ever faced, it is fronting the greatest opportunity and the most inspiring future that it has ever known. And if it is steadfastly true to the spirit of its great Master, the church of to-morrow will be the mightiest force for world-wide righteousness that the world has ever witnessed. The very *immensity* of the task is the church's challenge and inspiration. The church of the living God has ever thrilled to the challenge of the *impossible*.

The second general statement I want to make, is that we must not allow ourselves to be misled by optimistic statistics that seem to show that church attendance is as common and numerous as ever. We shall gain nothing by deceiving ourselves in this particular. Now and then we hear it asserted that the church is not losing its hold upon the people ; that there is as much interest in the church to-day as there ever was. This, it has been well

said, is a "case of whistling through a graveyard on a dark night." No, let us not deceive ourselves by allowing our wishes and desires to supplant our judgment. The fact is undeniable, both in Great Britain and America, that church attendance has steadily and seriously fallen off. There is only one statesmanlike thing for the church to do, namely, to recognize the facts as they actually are, to face them fairly, to adapt itself to the new conditions, and then to throw itself into the mastering of the situation with unabated courage and undiminished faith.

What shall the church do about Smith?

The church must *win* Smith, or fail in one great part of its divine mission. It will not do for us to bewail the fact that Smith has deserted the church, nor to lay the blame entirely upon him. The church must *win* Smith. How? Here lies one of the greatest problems of the modern church.

Now, there is not much use, it seems to me, in *arguing* with Smith. Smith has

ceased to care for the church, and you cannot argue with him about it any more than you can argue with your friend who has ceased to care for you. It is utterly useless to go to your estranged friend and to say to him: "You used to like me and enjoy my fellowship, why don't you now?" The question is not one for debate. You cannot *argue* the matter with him. That will not make him like you again. The only thing that you can do is to make yourself likeable to him, and to win back his affection. So it is useless for the church to try and *argue* Smith back into the pew again. The church must be made likeable to him, and be made to appear worth while to him, if it is to bring him back.

But how is this to be done? Not, I think, by merely *interesting* Smith. The church has a far more serious task on hand than merely interesting Smith: It must *win* Smith. I do not believe that the church will ever win Smith by merely arousing his passing interest. Recognizing the necessity

of adopting unusual methods to meet unusual conditions, I want to register my profound conviction that the church will never win Smith by means of side-shows or moving pictures. Smith does not need to be lured to the church with that kind of bait. If the object of the church is simply to interest Smith, then it will certainly fail, for on the score of pure interest and entertainment, it can never hope to compete with other agencies of amusement that are open to him.

Religion is a serious matter. It lays claim to the deepest and most vital part of a man's life. It is everything or nothing. And any attempt to "make it only a competitor among other forms of pastime or diversion" is sure to end in failure, and ought to. The higher the church places the claims of religion, the more likely is it that Smith will be moved and won. May it not be that the church is making a serious and fatal mistake here? The oldest of all the arts is gem-engraving, which began

when our ancestors, who had no tools, discovered that they could cut an image on a stone with the aid of another stone. There was but one thing necessary: the stone that cuts must be harder than the stone that is cut. That is all. When we complain that the church is making but little impression upon the world to-day, may it not be that the church has mistaken its tool? May the failure not be, not because the church is too hard, but because the church is too soft? The church must never let down her standards in order to win the world. She must ever remain intolerant of all forms of evil, as religion is intolerant. The very intolerance of religion, as Phillips Brooks once said, almost proves its divineness. It proclaims absolute standards and refuses to lower them. It will not say to any man or any set of men, "Your case is exceptional, and I will waive part of my demands in your interests." No! religion lifts aloft her absolute standards of purity and holiness,

and says to men everywhere and under all conditions : " I will not come down to you, you must come up to me." And whenever the church surrenders any of its divine standards or holy ideals in order to win Smith, it will not only sell its own birthright, but it will lose Smith in the bargain.

If the church is ever effectually to win Smith, it must offer him something that he will feel is worth while ; something that he cannot afford to do without. And this is the supreme claim of the Church of Christ. Then too, Smith must be made to feel that the church is deeply in earnest in its divine mission ; that it is deeply in earnest in its work for the bettering of mankind ; for the amelioration of the hardships and burdens of men ; that it is deeply in earnest in its purposes to answer own prayer, " Thy will be done on the earth as it is in heaven " ; that it is making an honest effort to inculcate and practise the spirit of Jesus in all the affairs of modern life ;

that it has deeply at heart all the great, vital interests that appeal to Smith.

But the church must go a step farther than this, it seems to me, if it is to win Smith. It must make Smith feel that it has a real, genuine interest in him and in his eternal well-being. I know that this sounds commonplace and trite, but I firmly believe it is one of the strongest factors in the solution of the problem. "I not am convinced by what you say ; I am not sure that I cannot answer every one of your arguments," said a man to a preacher who was urging upon him the claims of religion, "but there is one thing which I confess that I cannot understand. It puzzles me and makes me feel a power in what you say. It is why you should care enough for me to take all this trouble, and to labour with me as if you cared for my soul." That is the thing that gets fast hold on Smith when almost everything else fails.

Note that I said that the *church* must

take an interest in Smith. That means not only the minister, but those who sit in the pews and whose names are on the church register. And here is one of the cardinal weaknesses of the church to-day. It is apt to be a one-man affair, as far as any honest effort to win Smith is concerned. And whenever the church becomes a one-man affair, it is doomed to utter and absolute failure. The man in the pew, as well as the minister in the pulpit, must feel a sense of personal responsibility for Smith, if Smith is to be won and held. It is not enough for the minister to be interested in Smith. That, of course, is necessary, but still I sometimes feel it does not have as much weight as we think. Smith takes the interest of the minister for granted. It is the *business* of the minister to take an interest in Smith, and when he approaches him on the question of the church and religion, Smith feels that he is doing it largely because he feels it to be his duty and part of his work. "Oh, yes, that's

all right," said a man to me at one time, when I went to talk to him on the question of religion, "it's your business to do this."

But when some layman of the church, some man in whom Smith has confidence, and in whom he believes, approaches him on the question of religion, Smith will give careful and earnest heed. How many times have any of you business men, members of the church, spoken to Smith on the vital subject of religion and his own spiritual interests? Oh, I don't mean in any weak, hesitant, conventional way, as if you felt it to be a disagreeable duty, and were anxious to get through with it as quickly as possible. Any approach of that sort disgusts Smith and he resents it as an impertinence. I remember well the disgust I felt when, in a professional and conventional way, a man came up to me once and blurted out, "Brother, how's your soul?" No red-blooded man but resents, as a supreme impertinence, such an approach. But I mean that just as you talk with Smith on

business, and talk with him on politics, and talk with him on social questions, and talk with him on matters that are of mutual interest, so you will talk with him on religion and on his own spiritual well-being. Then you may be sure that Smith will give you an attentive hearing. For, say what you will, Smith is interested in religion, *deeply* interested. He is indifferent to ecclesiasticism, but not to religion. Man is incurably religious, and the need of worship is ineradicably wrought into the very fibres of his being. He does not know men who does not know that there is a deep religious under-current in the heart of mankind. "Amusement or recreation will never of themselves prove sufficient to fill the heart. Every now and then there is a pause in the rush of life, a musical rest in the song, and the low murmur of the far-away ocean challenges us with its eternal questioning."

I want to speak a word for Smith, and I think I know him when I say that I

do not for one moment believe that he is indifferent to religion. He is indifferent to a mere formal, conventional expression of religion, but a vital, statement of religion, that touches his life and appeals to the deepest part of him, is never a matter of indifference to Smith. He may be indifferent to the appeal of churchianity, but he is never indifferent to the appeal of Christianity.

What then is to be done? To quote Sir Joseph Compton-Rickett, "The answer is to be found in a restored message and in a church conscious of her duty and of her opportunity. If the Christian Church is only the custodian of a great tradition, and is not the expression of a living Person, who is sympathetic with the world of to-day, she will drop to the position of a debating society or be left to invent a philosophy for a secular theory of morals. 'Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?' Let her settle that question first of all. The promise and hope of that

Person has filled her life during the past centuries. If she has now parted with Him, let her reverently fold his linen clothes, and roll the stone back upon His garden grave. If she recovers her faith in that Person, instead of stammering her doubts, she will issue her commands. The church will recover that power of the keys once entrusted to her by her Master, and will then be able to turn the rusty locks of many a secular problem." With a re-baptism of faith in her great Head, the church will ascend into her heritage and claim her rightful place. Then multitudes who are now without her gates will press within her borders with new enthusiasm and new hope.

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